



THE UNIVERSITY *of* EDINBURGH

Edinburgh Research Explorer

Book review: A.H.M. Jones and the Later Roman Empire

Citation for published version:

Kelly, G 2010, 'Book review: A.H.M. Jones and the Later Roman Empire', *Bryn Mawr Classical Review*, vol. 2010, 2010.12.17. <<http://bmcr.brynmawr.edu/2010/2010-12-17.html>>

Link:

[Link to publication record in Edinburgh Research Explorer](#)

Document Version:

Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

Published In:

Bryn Mawr Classical Review

Publisher Rights Statement:

© Kelly, G. (2010). A.H.M. Jones and the Later Roman Empire (2008). Bryn Mawr Classical Review, 2010, [2010.12.17]

General rights

Copyright for the publications made accessible via the Edinburgh Research Explorer is retained by the author(s) and / or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing these publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

Take down policy

The University of Edinburgh has made every reasonable effort to ensure that Edinburgh Research Explorer content complies with UK legislation. If you believe that the public display of this file breaches copyright please contact openaccess@ed.ac.uk providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.



Cite As:

Kelly, G. (2010). A.H.M. Jones and the Later Roman Empire (2008). *Bryn Mawr Classical Review*, 2010, [2010.12.17]

Bryn Mawr Classical Review 2010.12.17

David M. Gwynn (ed.), *A. H. M. Jones and the Later Roman Empire. Brill's Series on the Early Middle Ages, v. 15.* Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2008. Pp. xv, 281. ISBN 9789004163836. \$142.00.

Reviewed by Gavin Kelly, University of Edinburgh (Gavin.Kelly@ed.ac.uk)

[Authors and titles are listed at the end of the review.]

Among English-speaking Romanists, the Later Roman Empire can denote not just a period and a geographical area, but also a book, A.H.M. Jones's *The Later Roman Empire 284-602: A Social, Economic, and Administrative Survey* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1964). Jones's great work (conventionally *LRE*) remains a fundamental tool for scholars of the later empire. There are several reasons for this: the most obvious is that it reflects Jones' astonishingly broad reading and prodigious memory of the primary sources. Jones aspired to have read everything surviving from his period, although he soon drew the line at various categories of text, notably sermons. His confidence in his accuracy was such that he submitted the two volumes of text to the press before the third volume of notes was ready. On virtually any aspect of social or political organisation, the *LRE* can usually be relied upon to present the ancient textual evidence in accurate and comprehensive detail: it is itself almost a primary source.

The book under review derives from a seminar series held in Oxford (where Jones was an undergraduate of New College and a Fellow of All Souls) to mark the *LRE*'s fortieth anniversary in 2004; a few additional papers were commissioned. The list of contributors is dominated by established scholars of distinction; all but one (Rebenich) work within the UK, and those with Oxford connections dominate. Only one (Liebeschuetz) was a pupil of Jones.

The book is divided into two unequal parts. The first part focuses on Jones himself and the *LRE*'s composition and reception; the second consists of studies of individual themes. The division, one presumes intentionally, reflects Jones' division of the *LRE* into a shorter (though still 300-page) narrative introduction, and a longer section of thematic surveys. The first chapter is a biographical sketch of Jones: its author, Alexander Sarantis, has spoken to pupils and relatives and done some archival research. Although any advances on the previous biographical accounts of Crook, Liebeschuetz, and Brunt are limited,¹ the chapter achieves what it means to, and a number of anecdotes illustrating Jones' prodigious memory and concern for primary evidence prepare us for the meat of the collection.

Peter Garnsey is a fellow of Jesus, Jones' Cambridge college, and his starting point is a box found in his college rooms, which contained some of Jones' papers from the time of the *LRE*'s composition. 'Jones' box is no treasure chest', Garnsey declares (27), but he

nevertheless uses it as the starting point for an illuminating study of Jones' method. What emerges above all is the importance of contact, oral or epistolary, with professional colleagues and the value he placed on his careful and systematic filleting of primary sources. In one case a letter to a colleague ends with a request to return it and its list of references to Jones 'with any comments that may occur to you... as I might want to use it myself.' Garnsey also discusses two themes which recur in Stefan Rebenich's chapter on Jones and continental scholarship: his attitude to previous *grands projets* in Roman history (especially those of Stein and Rostovtzeff), and the relative absence of citation of modern scholarship in the *LRE*. Jones' avowal in the preface that he had not had time for full coverage of modern scholarship is shown by Garnsey to be doubly disingenuous: first, in that he genuinely did undervalue modern scholarship; secondly, in that he had read much more than he admitted. Rebenich demonstrates the latter point well, illustrating not only the general influence of grand-scale works, but also listing a number of places where demonstrable influences on Jones from contemporary scholarship are simply unacknowledged in the notes. Rebenich also records the understandable bewilderment of continental European reviewers at this disregard. He concludes that Jones' ostentatious refusal to try to keep abreast of modern scholarship did little practical damage to his work, but should be seen as 'a striking example of academic self-fashioning' (60, cf. 44).

The papers of the second half are thematic, covering Jones' treatment of various important topics in the late Roman world: the emperor; bureaucrats and senators; law; the army; the cities; the economy; religion; and 'decline'. I shall discuss these chapters collectively rather than sequentially. Inevitably, the same structure repeatedly imposes itself (i.e. coverage of the theme before Jones; Jones' treatment; the reception of Jones; scholarship since; appraisal). Readers may therefore get an occasional sense of *déjà vu*. Still, these are all good surveys by acknowledged experts and are especially worthwhile for graduate students who wish to get a picture of the history of a particular area.

The *LRE*'s impact naturally varies from field to field. For Roger Tomlin, in a precise and characteristically elegant chapter on the fourth-century army, Jones 'remains the essential starting-point, and still quite often has the last word' (163). The same could be said of Jones on bureaucrats, curials, and senators, a subject covered in an excellent essay by Peter Heather. Caroline Humfress' chapter on law and justice confronts the problem that the *LRE*'s most relevant chapter (XIV) is entitled simply 'Justice'. Jones' interest was wholly focused on how law worked or did not work rather than on legal theory. She argues that his conclusions were based on remarkably wide reading and understanding of broader problems, and point the way to interpretations more optimistic than his own. His views of what his strident final chapter called 'The Decline of the Empire' and what Averil Cameron's chapter calls 'the End of the Ancient World' are another area where we can see an undoubted advance on his predecessors, but some tensions at least between his conclusions and his evidence. When it comes to emperors, there is a stark contrast between Jones' relative taciturnity, outside the narrative chapters, and the vast efflorescence of (mainly Anglophone) scholarship on emperors and their representation in the last few decades, described by Michael Whitby. Whitby concludes that 'the narrowness of Jones' vision is undoubtedly a weakness' (93). The emperor may have been a vital part of the structures of government which were Jones' main theme, but the vast divergences in the nature and the extent of imperial power across a 300-year period, as well as in emperors' attitudes to religion, would have created serious problems in a work which presented a cross-temporal survey of governmental and social structures without systematically exploring changes within them.

Jones' renunciation of archaeological evidence is a running theme. His reluctance to use it is to some degree surprising, as he had himself excavated in the near east and had written two major works on urbanism, *The Cities of the Eastern Roman Provinces* (1937) and *The Greek City from Alexander to Justinian* (1940). It is clear both from Luke Lavan's chapter on the cities and from Bryan Ward-Perkins' on the economy that a reliance on literary and epigraphic sources led to an overly pessimistic assessment (though Ward-Perkins is more generous to Jones for having replaced the far more morbid pessimism of his early twentieth-century predecessors). Both speculate that, to quote Ward-Perkins, 'it was not just [archaeology's] opacity, but also its open-endedness that he found difficult' (206, cf. 178). The vast growth in excavation over the last forty years rather proves the point. One is left with the paradox that the omission of archaeology is a flaw which has helped to preserve the *LRE*'s relevance. The same could be said of his treatment of the church solely from the point of view of organization, on which the editor, David Gwynn, has written his own chapter. Broader understanding of late-antique religion has been transformed by the very different sort of social history, focused on history of mentalities and associated above all with Peter Brown, which has flourished since the early 1970s.

All in all, this is a very worthwhile collection of fine essays; we should be grateful to Gwynn for assembling them. For those interested in a broad view of Jones' place in twentieth-century historiography, Garnsey and Rebenich's chapters, along with Cameron's chapter and Liebeschuetz's epilogue, will be the most valuable parts of the book; the other chapters of Section 2 will be useful for those with more specialized interests. Presumably this, like most Brill volumes, was not professionally copy-edited. There are inconsistencies of style between chapters and occasional lapses throughout, especially in punctuation. The English of Lavan's chapter could have done with more work.² On the whole, however, the editor has kept the text reasonably clean. There follow some errata and a complete table of contents.

3: Jones' grandfather Dr Hugh Jones lived to a good age, but not from 1807-1919! The birth year should be 1837. The web address in n. 2 should not have a hyphen. 9: The letters FSA (Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries) are misinterpreted to make Jones a Fellow of the (non-existent) Scottish Academy. 15: Jones is said to have ensured that Cambridge University Library stored previously scattered works on epigraphy and calligraphy in the same place. Presumably 'calligraphy' should be 'papyrology'? 74 and 76: Constantine VII should be called Porphyrogenitus (or -gennetos), not -gennitus. 90: Claudian was almost certainly in Milan, not Rome, when he wrote *In Eutropium* in 399. 108, cf. also 112: 'Jones of course knew Libanius' famous diatribe against some of the administrative officers of Constantius II, which emphasised their obscure and generally sordid social origins.' Famous or not, it would have been helpful to give readers a reference to Libanius Or. 42. 139 and n. 50: Hans Teitler's 1985 monograph on Notarii is wrongly said to be in Dutch with an English summary (the Dutch edition is that of 1983); Teitler's middle name is Carel not Carol. 168-169: The impression is given that 'Petit on Libanius' and 'Petit on Antioch' are different books, rather than the same monograph of 1955. 174: This could be read as implying that Libanius was a senator. 182: The reference to the *pater civitatis/pater ths polews* [sic, no Greek font] is ugly. 192 n. 5: 'One can almost hear the groans of the translator, struggling, and failing, under the weight of Oertel's ponderous prose.' Nice: but I wonder if Ward-Perkins originally wrote 'flailing' (or 'falling')?

Section 1: The Man and the Historian

1. Alexander Sarantis, 'Arnold Hugh Martin Jones (1904-1970)', 3-24

2. Peter Garnsey, 'Writing the Late Roman Empire: Method and Sources', 25-41
 3. Stefan Rebenich, 'Jones and Continental Scholarship', 43-62
 - Section 2: The Later Roman Empire
 4. Michael Whitby, 'The Role of the Emperor', 65-96
 5. Peter Heather, 'Running the Empire: Bureaucrats, Curials, and Senators', 97-119
 6. Caroline Humfress, 'Law and Justice in the *Later Roman Empire*', 121-142
 7. Roger Tomlin, 'A.H.M. Jones and the Army of the Fourth Century', 143-165
 8. Luke Lavan, 'A.H.M. Jones and "The Cities" 1964-2004', 167-191
 9. Bryan Ward-Perkins, 'Jones and the Late Roman Economy', 193-211
 10. David Gwynn, 'Idle Mouths and Solar Haloes: A.H.M. Jones and the Conversion of Europe', 213-229
 11. Averil Cameron, 'A.H.M. Jones and the End of the Ancient World', 231-249
 - Afterword. Wolfgang Liebeschuetz, 'A.H.M. Jones and the Later Roman Empire', 252-269
-

Notes:

[1.](#) J. Crook, 'Arnold Hugh Martin Jones, 1904-1970', *Proceedings of the British Academy* 57 (1971), 425-438; J.H.W.G. Liebeschuetz, 'A.H.M. Jones and the *Later Roman Empire*', *Bulletin of the Institute of Archaeology* 29 (1992), 1-8; P.A. Brunt, 'Jones, Arnold Hugh Martin (1904-1970)' in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford UP, 2004), entry 34223.

[2.](#) To give one example where the sense is obscured, Lavan writes (182-3): 'In both town and country there was now a tendency towards fewer larger residences.' Does he mean 'fewer large residences' or 'fewer but larger residences'? (I suspect the latter, but it's far from evident).